



Interview - Karin Lange

WP 2

Activity 1 (Leaders Interview)

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Interview Metadata

Date of Interview:	22.07.2025
Interviewer Name:	Franziska Bommas
Consent for data collection	yes
Additional remarks on the interview	The interview was conducted as an online conversation.

Meet the leader

Name:	Karin Lange
Age:	52
Gender:	female
Current role and position:	Chair of the "einsmehr" association
Years of Work Experience:	15
Years in Leadership Roles:	15
Organization:	Einsmehr Initiative Down-Syndrom Augsburg
Sector of Activity:	Social
Country / City:	Germany, Augsburg
Organization Size:	<input type="checkbox"/> Micro <input type="checkbox"/> Small <input type="checkbox"/> Medium xLarge



Main Interview Content

Interview Section	Summary of Answers	Selected Quotes
<p>The Path to Leadership Key moments, challenges, values</p>	<p>Karin Lange’s journey into leadership began unintentionally, driven by personal need and community engagement. After moving to Augsburg and engaging with a self-help group for parents of children with Down-Syndrome, she initiated the founding of the association “einsmehr” when that group risked dissolving. Her professional background in hospitality helped shape her role, leading to major milestones: founding a hotel that employs people with and without disabilities equally, creating a training academy, and launching the inclusive “Backmobil.” These efforts were grounded in strong values of inclusion, practical problem-solving, and team-oriented leadership. Over time, she grew into a public-facing leadership role. She emphasizes that leadership for her is rooted in collective vision, not hierarchy, and believes deeply in future-oriented collaboration through initiatives like visioning workshops and team retreats.</p>	<p>“And so it was easy to make the switch and say, now I’m going to build up the association and organize various events, let’s see what our members want, and that was and is absolutely my thing and enriches me totally, and I really thrive in that environment.”</p> <p>“We have 24 employees there, and exactly half of them have disabilities—very different disabilities, because that’s just the way it is. Inclusion means that anyone who wants to apply to us can apply, and then we look at whether they fit into this team.”</p> <p>“I don’t see us as a hierarchy, but rather as one big team.”</p>
<p>Your Approach to Leading Inclusion, decision-making, vision</p>	<p>Karin Lange prioritizes recognition and respect at the individual level. She practices deeply personal leadership, knowing birthdays, following up on challenges, and acknowledging contributions both privately and publicly. Her vision of inclusion is lived daily: staff decisions are made based on strengths, not deficits, and all voices are valued equally. She ensures that achievements, even small ones, are publicly appreciated, and actively encourages feedback. A sustainable and empowering shift was the transition from all-volunteer work to paid roles, navigating the complexity of equity between volunteers and paid staff</p>	<p>“No, I try to be very attentive, to know when their birthdays are, if they have any problems, to follow up on them, so that they really feel seen and not just in their role.”</p>



	<p>with sensitivity. She believes leadership is shared and built through trust, empathy, and fostering a safe environment where all feel seen and valued.</p>	<p>“(…) we have to look out for each other very carefully because we are an inclusive team, but at the same time that is also our strength, (…)”</p>
<p>Driving Change Strategies for sustainable and positive outcomes</p>	<p>Karin Lange’s leadership fosters collaboration at all levels—from monthly board meetings to cross-organizational partnerships. She seeks shared responsibility and engages in decision-making through frequent dialogue rather than top-down directives. Outcomes are assessed through tangible impacts, such as employment of people with disabilities in the open labor market, feedback from participants, and growing partnerships with businesses. Success is also measured through emotional moments, like seeing inclusive teams celebrated at festivals or youth volunteers moved by their experience. The reach of their work (e.g., school outreach, public events) has built a sustainable model of inclusion that extends beyond their organization into wider society.</p>	<p>“Exactly, but nevertheless, especially when it comes to the new generation, you have to find someone who fits the bill, someone you can turn to when you have any concerns or needs, someone who can carry on the work just as well, someone who can tie everything together.”</p> <p>“But the fact that there are still so few (who come into contact with people with disabilities) leads us to believe that much more could be achieved in terms of inclusion and equality if we created many more spaces for this, which is why we are spreading the word everywhere.”</p>
<p>Bias & Belonging Tools, practices, awareness</p>	<p>Karin Lange and her team use various tools to promote awareness of bias and ensure belonging, including structured reflection during retreats and Klausurtagungen (strategy days), ongoing feedback mechanisms, and advisory boards that include members with Down syndrome. They design their groups and projects to build trust, which is essential for diverse voices to be heard. Regular informal conversations and targeted check-ins are key tools in identifying gaps in inclusion. Space is made for all members to be heard—whether in youth groups, at social events, or in feedback sessions—ensuring not only participation but also co-ownership of their inclusive culture.</p>	<p>“So that they can participate everywhere, so that inclusion works not only according to the parents’ ideas, but also according to the ideas of our members and our children.”</p> <p>“Our board meetings are always open to the public, so any member can attend, but I also always send out a circular email to let you know if you have</p>



		<p>anything to say but don't want to come to the meeting or don't want to say it there. In that case, trust me and tell me your concerns. Talk to me privately, and I'll always give you several options.”</p>
<p>Sharing What Works Inspiration, examples, transferable tools</p>	<p>Karin Lange advocates for trying things out without fear of failure. Many of their successful initiatives started small: the hotel, the academy, the Backmobil, school outreach. These grew through iterative learning and feedback. She stresses the importance of regular, community-centered routines—like shared meals, thank-you events, and personal acknowledgment of contributions. Inspiration is drawn from lived experiences and grassroots innovation rather than formal theory. She also mentions the Embrace network as a resource for peer learning among inclusive hotels, where staff and ideas are exchanged. Her philosophy is simple: "If not us, then who?"—encouraging others to act, adapt, and create change through doing.</p>	<p>“So, of course, regular meetings, regular listening, regular community life in a positive sense, so that you don't just get together to work, but also get together for other reasons.”</p> <p>“If not us, then who?”</p> <p>“And I always say, if we don't do it, who will? And you can also have limitations, you can also have obstacles put in your way, or you can also have a wall and say that was something we wanted to do, but we just can't get any further. But that doesn't matter in terms of the experience we've gained up to that point, up to that wall. You can pass it on to other committees and say, try it out, or you can say, we gained this experience during this time. We didn't achieve the goal, but we can now use the experience for a different setting, for a different action. I think just trying things out is my motto.”</p>





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